

# BEAR FACTS

Vestal High School, Vestal, NY 13850

November 2012



## The Importance of Political Action

By Anita Raychawdhuri

Obama, Romney or who even cares?! With the current election, politics have been thrust into the spotlight, adding interest for the general public. Politics is an extremely important subject all year round, after all they affect each and every one of us. Sadly, less and less people are caring about the government. It is important to take an active interest in current affairs and understand one's government. As students, it is easy to dismiss them as something you don't need to care about or get involved in, however developing an interest in politics as a teenager will nurture a care about one's country that will last a lifetime.

Activism doesn't mean picketing outside the White House or vigorously debating with others. Activism is as simple as getting involved. Watch the news, read articles about local and world politics, try to understand what's going on in the world. Having a knowledge of the political system and policies of one's country is necessary to understand the basics of one's world. This important care is lacking, especially among young people. Be-

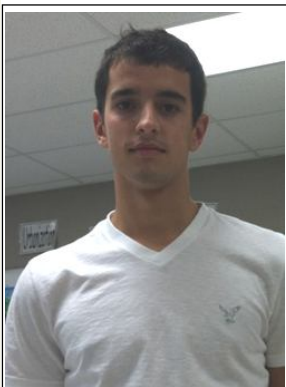
come interested in your country and the policies of the government because one day they will affect you, so it is worthy to understand them.

Causes for activism do not have to be purely based around Presidential campaigns. It can be on issues such as civil rights, the environment, animal rights, or any other that brings forth strong emotion is a good place to start. Caring about politics is embarking upon a journey to make a difference.

With the election today, activism is needed among students more than ever. Though not all students in high school can vote, they will all be future voters. Activism is a personal thing and it can be as big or as little of an effort as one would prefer, but activism gives people an awareness of causes that form crucial opinions about their country. Being an individual thinker who contemplates the world truly is valuable, as corny as it sounds. So watch the debates, research causes that interest you and get involved. Read, Think, Act.

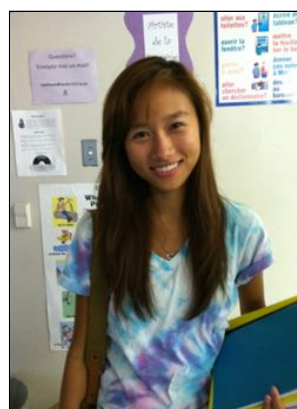
# Election Day 2012

## How your peers have participated in the current election



John Pedro:

"I have been an avid Romney supporter prior to the 2008 Presidential election. I have contributed to this election by donating to the Romney campaign and creating the Facebook page, 'Young Americans for Mitt Romney.'"

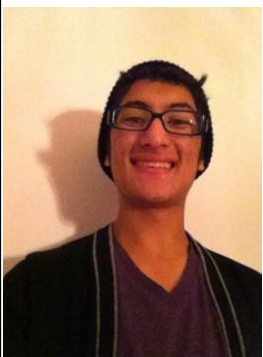


Sarah Lam:

"Although I can't vote, I think it is important to keep up with the issues, watch the debates, and make your own decision."

Kavish Harjai:

"I volunteered with Anita at the BC Democratic headquarters. I find that it is extremely important to know what is going on in your own country and to have an opinion no matter if you can vote or not."



Anita Ray:

"I helped out by volunteering at the Broome County Democratic headquarters for the organizing for America group. I participated in phone banks and have been watching the debates to keep up with what's going on."



# Bear Facts Opinions Page

November 2012

## Why President Obama should be re-elected

By Rohin Shah

Four years ago, candidate Barack Obama stood in front of the entire nation, and preached a message of hope and change. He made many promises to Americans of reforming Washington D.C., and vowed to never get entangled in the dirty and volatile politics of the presidency. We, a nation of war weary and tired citizens, happily obliged; the prospect of a new start, a new party, and a young and vibrant candidate attracted Americans across all ideological, socioeconomic and racial divides.

Today, as now-President Barack Obama stands in front of us seeking reelection, many, even his most enthusiastic and outspoken supporters, are beginning to question his leadership and abilities as our Commander and Chief. Some claim the President hasn't done enough to help the economy, while others argue he's grown the size of government too much. However, when the President's and Governor Romney's records are seriously considered, the choice in this election could not be any clearer.

This election is unlike any other in our lifetimes; this isn't merely a choice between two parties, but a choice between personal freedom and government mandates, a level playing field and one that's skewed against the middle class. Mitt Romney, while a dedicated father and brilliant businessman, is simply out of touch with the American public. He's been blessed with a wonderfully lavish lifestyle, which has unfortunately made him unable to empathize with the common citizen- the retiree unable to afford his health care costs, or the student struggling with tuition. Furthermore, his views on the tax code, women's reproductive issues and same-sex marriage simply are outdated. They do not reflect the changing views of Americans, nor do they respect the overwhelming calls for equality heard across the nation. In contrast, Barack Obama has spent every day of his term fighting for equality for all. One of the first bills he signed was the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, which made it illegal for women to earn a lower salary than a man for the same position. In addition, the President repealed Don't Ask Don't Tell, which made it illegal for homosexuals to serve openly in our nations armed forces. In contrast, Governor Romney supported Don't Ask Don't Tell,

and criticized the President when he moved to repeal it. Later in the election however, the governor said he would not reverse President Obama's decision to repeal the bill. This flip flop is just another in a series of inconsistent and changing positions Governor Romney has adopted in an attempt to

garner votes. And, just a few months ago, President Obama became the first sitting President to publicly support same-sex marriage. On the other side, Mitt Romney has vehemently opposed same-sex marriage, even vowing to block state and federal legislation to legalize it.

In the realm of economics, this president and administration have saved America from the biggest economic disaster since the Great Depression. President Obama inherited a crippled and unraveling economy when he took office, due to the irresponsible and unregulated decisions made by the Bush administration. However, through hard work and an appeal to common sense, the president has passed many bills to help ameliorate the economic problems we faced and to put us back on the road to power and greatness. When Mitt Romney dismissed the auto industry, and publicly opposed any help for Detroit, President Obama bet on American workers. Today, because of the auto bailout, the Big Three are stronger than ever, making record profits. They've paid back every dime of taxpayer money, with massive interest. The president has created over 5.2 million private sector jobs in his term, and has seen 31 consecutive months of job growth. He fought aggressively to prevent an economic free fall, and we can see the effects: unemployment is back at where it was when he assumed office, and growth, albeit sluggish, is increasing every quarter. The president will work relentlessly, with both sides, to put Americans back to work if he is given a second term.

Finally, on the topic of taxes; while the governor favors tax cuts for the super-wealthy such as himself, the President simply asks that those who had fared well in our amazing country contribute a little more, to ease the

huge burden on the middle class. Under the Governor's current plan, middle class workers will see their taxes increase by \$2,000. It's unimaginable that our government would ask more of struggling families, while the rich

get cuts and deductions they clearly don't need. Although, if you ask Governor Romney about his tax plan, he'll simply say he'll reduce deductions, without saying which ones, or how. Mitt Romney's plans is essentially this: vote for me and I'll tell you my plan later. We cannot afford four years of the failed policies of President Bush; we need President Obama's common sense economics to return us to safety and growth.

There is no question that we have a long and difficult road ahead of us, but as nation of hard workers and innovators, we can overcome any obstacle we face. President Obama has spent the last four years fighting for you, and he has won the chance to continue his work. Given another term, the president will bring America back to greatness, and he will reclaim our position as the greatest nation in the world. And if you need another reason to re-elect Barack Obama, remember this: Osama Bin Laden is dead, and General Motors is alive.

## DASA's message is no joke

By Dan Park

Although it was signed in 2010, DASA (Dignity for All Students Act) has recently taken effect as of July 1, 2012. The purpose of the law is to protect students from discrimination based on national origin, ethnicity, weight, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

However, the law intended to be for the students has lost its meaningfulness and has become subject to mockery by the students in this school. For example, because the definition of "bullying" has been expanded and more specifically defined students often find the need to make trivial "DASA" outbursts. When students disagree with each other or argue, the students shout "DASA, DASA" as a lighthearted joke. The lack of seriousness of DASA could be attributed to the over emphasis and such dire tone that it is presented in. Students may be abusing the word "DASA" because they find it humorous and comical, but they fail to appreciate its original intent of providing a safe environment.

Furthermore, student opinions vary on the subject of this newly implemented law. Senior, Charlotte Wade says, "While DASA is being presented like it was created to protect the students, I believe that the true purpose of DASA is to protect the schools from lawsuits." Whatever people think, it is important to keep in mind the importance of DASA's true meaning.

# The Case for Mitt Romney

By John Pedro

Imagine a resourceful leader; a man who is experienced, intelligent, confident, and capable. A man, who, in life, has accomplished what most people only dream about, and who, in politics, has succeeded with issues that most politicians only talk about. That man is Mitt Romney, and as a nation, we would be wise to hand him the reigns to the Presidency.

Mitt Romney wields a prolific bundle of experiences that constitute an impressive career in business and public service, credentials that have qualified him to be President. He graduated from Harvard with not just a law degree, but an MBA as well. In the words of former President Bill Clinton, a Democrat, Romney's business career was "sterling." Romney moved on from consulting and private equity into public life, becoming CEO and President of the 2002 Olympic Games in Salt Lake City, helping to save an event that

was scandal-ridden and headed for insolvency. He later became the Governor of Massachusetts, and despite its liberal trademark, passed numerous significant pieces of legislation, all on a bipartisan basis (87% of the state legislature was comprised of Democrats).

It is important to note that Barack Obama is an intelligent individual and role-model who exemplifies the American Dream. The endorsement and backing of a Romney candidacy is not a rebuke of Obama as a man, but rather the policies that have characterized his stint as President. We must recognize the wisdom of Albert Einstein when he stated, many decades ago, "The significant problems of our time can't be solved by the same level of thinking that

created them." The hope and optimism that swept Obama to the Presidency have long since been replaced by inflexibility, pettiness, and triviality. Today the American people yearn not

just for a new leader, but for a successful one. Mitt Romney is that leader.

Barack Obama issued a call for hope in 2008. Hope for what? I'm still not sure, but the American people gave him the chance to lead the way to a better future, and he squandered that opportunity. Today, Ambassador Chris Stevens is dead, our national debt stands at sixteen trillion dollars, and President Obama has spent an entire campaign devoted to the paltry politics of subsidies for Big Bird and illusory tax breaks for corporate jets, all the while

utilizing scare tactics and divisive rhetoric to monger fear amongst the American people. At present, there are over twenty-three million Americans out-of-work, and the labor force participation rate, or the percentage of Americans working, is at its lowest point in over 35 years. This is a sheer, downright tragedy. Our schools are ranked treacherously and unacceptably low on a global scale, a debt crisis is threatening to wreak havoc on our future, and the revolutionary call for change issued by Barack Obama in 2008 has faded into a message of cynicism and demagoguery. The world is entwisted in a series of conflicts and complexities that are intensified by the vague, non-committal, and fuzzy foreign policy that has been the hallmark of an incompetent Obama Administration. We mustn't accept the "new normal." Rather, we should embrace an agenda of bold reform that tackles our challenges head-on.

## Planned Parenthood funding at risk if Romney wins

By Anita Raychawdhuri

An organization that has been so monumental in helping women all over America is Planned Parenthood. This organization and the funding of it has been discussed by both candidates in the upcoming election. There is a common misconception that the organization funds the reckless behavior of women and promotes random sex, but this could not be further from the truth. The organization's goal is to provide gynecological and sexual health care, advocate for awareness and health in these areas to protect women and keep them informed.

The services offered at Planned Parenthood include walk-in visits where women can receive emergency contraception without a prescription for \$15 (a lot cheaper than at pharmacies) at age 17. There are also abortion referrals, methods of birth control, HIV and other STD testing, services for the

LGBT community, pregnancy testing and services, vaccines, mammograms, pap smears and general women's health care.

It is a mistaken belief that Planned Parenthood clinics are just to do with abortion. In fact, abortion is only 3% of Planned Parenthoods Services.

Presidential candidate, Governor Mitt Romney said, "Planned Parenthood, we're going to get rid of that" on the subject of funding the organization. It is one of the things he wishes to cut in order to save money. Anti-abortion pro-lifers also argue that we shouldn't use government money to fund abortion. Ironically, Planned Parenthood is not allowed to use government money for abortion services. Instead, the money is spent on the many other vital women's health services the organization provides.

President Barak Obama has a contrasting response to Romney's opinion, saying that, "Mr. Romney

wants to get rid of funding for Planned Parenthood. I think that's a bad idea. I've got two daughters. I want to control their own health care choices."

Whether funding for Planned Parenthood is necessary or not, it is essential to appreciate the good the organization does and its importance to many women. In bad economic times, choices must be made and cuts are inevitable, however, before writing an organization off as insignificant, one must understand its goals.

The health care given by Planned Parenthood is necessary to many women and if potentially cut by Mitt Romney, many women would lose their one source of gynecological care.

### Bear Facts

The views expressed on these two pages reflect those of the student writers, either individually as reflected in signed opinion pieces.

Students at Vestal High School are encouraged to share their views by submitting letters to the editor to **Bear Facts** for publication. The staff reserves the right to reject submissions that are inappropriate.

To submit an article, photograph, or letter to the editor, email your submission to

**VHSBearFacts@gmail.com**

or contact any of the editors listed on page two in this edition.

# Bear Facts

A Review by Sahiba Kahai

## Elementary a show worth watching

To all of you who are fans of those wonderful short stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Sherlock Holmes is back. But this time, he is in the Big Apple and Watson is a girl? Let me explain.

*Elementary* is a new show this year that airs on CBS. For those who don't know who Sherlock Holmes is, he is an astute observer who uses his skills to solve crimes. In the show, Holmes, played by Jonny Lee Miller, is a Londoner living in New York City and working with the New York Police Department. However, he has just been released from rehab and Dr. Joan Watson, played by Lucy Liu, joins him as his sobriety partner. Holmes and Watson are now taking on cases that we may see in our own modern day society: murders, kidnappings, cold cases, but they still keep in touch with the original air of the stories, which has been attractive to the old fans of Sherlock Holmes.

Even with only a few episodes so far, there are quite a few things that have been casually thrown into the story that pay homage to the original stories. For example, Holmes originally had fish tattoos on his arms, indicating that he has spent time in the Orient, leading many readers to believe that Holmes has an affinity for smoking opium in his famous pipe. Our contemporary Holmes has tattoos on the majority of his back and chest and was in rehab,

recovering from an addiction. Holmes has a famous paramour, Irene Adler, in the stories and she is hinted at in the premiere as being the reason Holmes had to leave London in the first place. Watson remains a doctor and of course, Holmes still lives at 221B Baker Street.

Now, many of you are astounded that the creators of this show are taking such a huge liberty in making Watson a woman. Personally, even I was hesitant to even think about watching this show. However, Lucy Liu does a fantastic job as Watson. Yes, it's not the same because Watson was a man in the stories, but it actually is quite interesting when characters in the show ask Holmes or Watson what they are to each other. Every time, Holmes makes some joke as to what Watson is, never actually specifying that she is his sobriety partner. Jonny Lee Miller also does an amazing job in being the legendary Holmes, who doesn't quite understand social graces, but somehow manages to creep his way into your heart.

A Review by Rachel Yang

## New Rowling novel boasts authentic characters

### The Decision of Difference

By Jen Almy

They're holding me down  
They won't let me break from this ground

I know I'm strong enough to stand on my own  
Yet, they don't believe in my tone

I'm reaching so far; I'll go far I bet  
But I can't ignore the limits they've set

Why can't they let go, why can't I shake them free  
They shouldn't have this much control over me

They can't make me change  
I have my own range

My intentions aren't rude  
But, this time, I must intrude

I'm different because time doesn't halt  
I want respect, I'm not at fault

It's what I deserve  
I swear it, I will be heard

Let me be who I am, quiet or crazy

The *Harry Potter* novels are a worldwide phenomenon; virtually ubiquitous in pop-culture, they have dominated the best-sellers list, as well as the hearts of readers everywhere. The woman behind these intensely beloved fantasy novels, J.K. Rowling, is arguably just as much of a household name. Although often exploring intensely sinister matters, her novels manage a balance of humor and poignancy, and thus captured a whole generation's attention as fans went along with Harry: through growing up, going to wizarding school, and defeating the most menacing dark wizard the world has ever seen.

Now Rowling is back, releasing her first novel since the series ended in 2007. *The Casual Vacancy*, released in September of this year, is also her first adult novel. The book revolves around an idyllic English town called Pagford and the events that ensue after a local parish councilor dies, leaving a "casual vacancy". Barry Fairbrother's death shocks the close-knit town, and a power struggle quickly occurs over who gets this now vacated position on the council. Factions arise over deciding whether local council estate "The Fields" (a notoriously poor neighborhood that houses many residents who rely on government welfare and/or attend the drug rehabilitation clinic) should remain as part of Pagford, or instead

join its neighboring city of Yarvil. The book focuses on the major players running for councilor, and their children who are harboring their own secrets. A particular focus is on Krystal Weedon, a girl who lives in the Fields with her heroin-addicted mother. She dreams of escaping her traumatic life, and through the help of Barry Fairbrother, she decides to join the school's rowing team and strives to improve her situation. However, in the wake of her mentor's death, Krystal must go through her struggles alone as she tries to take care of her younger brother by herself and convince her mother to seek treatment.

Although the *Harry Potter* series appealed to a wide variety of fans, they often explored extremely stark areas of life as Harry matured and faced increasingly grim obstacles. Perhaps this may draw readers to *The Casual Vacancy*, as the novel uncovers many grimy details hidden beneath a seemingly perfect English town. Rowling's new novel explores sinister events on a different level than witchcraft and wizardry; instead, she focuses around current social issues. Krystal Weedon, in a way, is the underdog striving to defeat

her own 'dark lord'. In her case, it manifests itself as the poverty that has absorbed her entire life, not an evil wizard clamoring to rule the wizarding world. She struggles to escape the clutches that her own mother has fallen in; drug abuse, prostitution, petty theft. Each character's private agendas are shown, as well as their greed and prejudices. Although written as masterfully as *Harry Potter*, this new novel deals with more current societal problems, such as class warfare, racism, drug addiction, prostitution, etc. No person is flaw-free, and thus is intensely relatable and authentic. There is no black and white, no good vs. evil. The characters often demonstrate selfish or irrational behavior, but contain redeeming and sympathetic qualities so that the reader can empathize with them.

Overall, *The Casual Vacancy* is a worthy read, blending social criticism and humor with nuance. However, it is lengthy at 512 pages, and it's likely many *Harry Potter* fans will be disappointed by the austere and often mundane world of local politics.



## Ms. Doolittle plans student trip to Peru

By Jen Almy

“I’m excited about being able to share with students a cross-cultural experience” explains Ms. Doolittle. The event that she reacts so strongly about is the upcoming Peru trip in 2013 during spring break. Students will be traveling to various parts of Peru including Lima, the capital, along with the Amazon basin, Cuzco, and Machu Picchu, which has recently been named one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

Yet, this will not be Miss Doolittle’s first exciting traveling experience. In July of this past year, she was given the opportunity through a grant to explore six cities in Japan. She visited Okanowa and learned the strategic reason as to why the Americans attacked Hiroshima specifically during World War II. She also visited the city of Hiroshima, where she gained a further understanding of the extent of damage the atomic bomb had on Japan. Although she was given horrific visuals and knowledge of the event, which she states was extremely “intense and disturbing,” her visit with an atomic bomb survivor was uplifting and, by-far, the most memorable part of her visit to Japan, she said. “I better understood Japan’s point of view,” she explained. Furthermore, she obtained a full understanding of the devastation of total war. The survivor, she said, left her in amazement due to his optimism, non-hatred, and promotion of peace. He demonstrated his desire for others to avoid war and to learn from the atomic bomb, which surprised her. He did not want revenge at all, regardless of what his people had been through. Ms. Doolittle found this survivor so inspiring that she is planning on showing her classes the video she took of him so that they may better understand her experience and possibly, better understand and realize the Japanese point of view just as she had.

However, whether one is traveling across the world, meeting an inspirational bomb survivor, or visiting the capital of Lima, Ms. Doolittle expresses “there’s never a trip you regret going on.”

Student spotlight by Katyanna Guthrie

## Vesai Sisaveth: Chef at Kampai

Imagine sitting at Kampai, the oldest Japanese restaurant in the Binghamton area, lounging at a small corner table as soothing Japanese music and savory aromas permeates the atmosphere. Your chef, Vesai Sisaveth arrives presently, looking glorious in his stark white uniform and scarlet hat. He begins his routine immediately, juggling knives with mesmerizing ease, flicking eggs into the air to land neatly inside his hat and pocket, making onion mountains and lighting them on fire. On October 3<sup>rd</sup>, that’s exactly what I did, with the intention of eating amazing Japanese food and interviewing Sisaveth.

“I’ve been working here for two years,” Vesai Sisaveth said, never breaking pace or pausing in his cooking performance. Initially, he worked at Kampai as a dishwasher, but that changed about a year ago when he was promoted because

“they didn’t have enough chefs to work all the tables.”

“The tricks aren’t nearly as hard as people think they are, and that’s surprising,” Sisaveth said. “I trained at Kampai with a hard-boiled egg for a while, and got the hang of it pretty quickly. I still make mistakes though—once an egg broke inside my pocket.” He still advises people not to try the tricks at home, especially the ones involving knives. While not planning on making his current job into a career, (he plans on going into law enforcement), Sisaveth still seems to enjoy working at the restaurant. “I really love cooking fish,” he said. “It’s also my favorite thing to eat—makes sense.” His only negative comment on the working environment was that it was “very hot.”

But more than his performance, the food Vesai makes

really captured my attention. His hibachi is to *die* for, savory and salty and filling. His love for cooking fish is reflected in his final product: resting on the tongue, it seems to melts like butter while the flavor suffuses and stimulates every part of the mouth. People walk out noticeably fatter than they walk in, their pocketbooks dented only slightly for the privilege.

Vesai Sisaveth works on Wednesday and Friday evenings, and is often called in on Saturdays as well. To request him as a chef, make a reservation at (607) 798-7521. For more information on Kampai’s hours, current specials, or events, visit their facebook page or website at <http://www.kampaijapanesesteakhouse.com/index.htm>

## Marching Band season ends on a high note

By Victoria Sarnoski

The Vestal Marching Band has been doing very well this year, compared to years past. Drum Major, Gabby Baxter, said, “It’s a great show, and it’s really cool. It’s a lot of fun.” This year, their performance has been centered around the works of Tim Burton, featuring “This is Halloween” from the movie *Nightmare Before Christmas*. Tim Burton is a filmmaker, famous for his dark, quirky themed movies such as *Edward Scissorhands* and *Corpse Bride*. The percussionists even dressed in skeleton costumes.

Ailey MacDonnell, the prop designer, comments: “It’s going really well. The visuals are awesome, and it takes a lot of work. We’re all like one big family.”

The Golden Circle of Bands was held on October 6<sup>th</sup>, and there was a competition on October 20<sup>th</sup>. The Championships were held on October 28<sup>th</sup>. The Vestal Golden Bears placed eighth in their class behind. Scores for their class were as follows:

Westmoreland, 1st, 76.60  
Marcus Whitman, 1st, 76.60  
Division Ave., 3rd, 74.60  
Midland Park, 4th, 74.30  
Bath-Haverling, 5th, 72.55  
Falconer, 6th, 72.15  
Floral Park, 7th, 70.95  
**Vestal, 8th, 70.00**  
Pioneer, 9th, 69.05  
Wellsville, 10th, 66.15  
Hornell, 11th, 64.05

### Attention Seniors

**Have you had  
your yearbook  
picture taken yet?**

**If not, see Ms.  
Vanderpool or Mr.  
Weisse in Social  
Studies ASAP!!**

## For English teacher Mr. Marcin, running is a part of life

By Dan Park

I received the wonderful opportunity to interview Mr. Marcin, an English teacher at our high school, about his passion for running. Mr. Marcin has been involved with running since his sophomore year of high school, when his best friend convinced him to join the cross country team, despite that he was on the varsity soccer team. Mr. Marcin ended up really enjoying running and has been running ever since.

When asked what his interim and long term goals were, he said that his short term goal was to “outrun his

biological clock” and his long term goal was “to make it a lifestyle and continue to run until old age and share his love of running with his family.” Furthermore, when asked about what inspires him to run, he said, “Personal improvement. I set goals for myself and take pride in the sacrifice and hard work it takes and achieving the goal.” He also says, “Running is not an activity, it is a life style.”

Mr. Marcin’s effective teaching can clearly be seen in the classroom, and when I asked him how running helps his professional life, he said, “Running requires

discipline, dedication, and sacrifice. It teaches me to set goals for myself and work hard until I reach them. Sometimes I get my best ideas for the classroom when I’m in the middle of a run.” It is wonderful to see a teacher enjoy a sport that many students can relate to. Moreover, we wish him the best in his endeavors and his goal of sharing his love for running with his family, and I think it is a safe bet to say that his running will continue to inspire him and help him achieve his professional goal and career of helping students in the classroom become better writers.

# Bear Facts

## French Exchange: Closing the gap

By Mallory Morgan

Last month, many American students received a little taste a French culture- and displayed their own- when Vestal hosted the French Exchange Program. All the way from a region called Sedan, France, twenty-one French high school students spent two weeks in America - one week in Vestal and another in NYC. While here, they were treated to American cuisine, such as chocolate chip cookies (almost unheard of in France!), bubble tea, and hamburgers. They also witnessed some genuine American football and visited Stoughton's Farm to take part in their famed corn mazes. They carved some jack-o-lanterns and shopped. The biggest event of all, however, was when the entire group spent a day on the Canadian side of the Niagara Falls. All students participated in Maid of the Mist and took a trip under the falls.

Valentine, Adele Learner's exchange student, exclaimed of America, "It is so big! I like it!", while Guillaume, Sam Boyd's student, and many others liked Niagara Falls best because of its amazing vistas. They disliked American food, however, because it is "fatty" and the portions are too large. In France, they said, it was easier to find healthy choices in restaurants and stores. The biggest difference in school life between the two countries, students concluded, was the attitude of the teachers. In France, texters have their



Members of the VHS French Club and their guests from Sedan, France

phones confiscated, and a student who gets up during a class for any reason is immediately told to sit. Talking in class is simply not tolerated, and America's leniency astonished the French students. Another huge difference is the intolerance of America to alcohol and drugs- substances used more casually, though in moderation, among young people in France.

All in all, the experience was enjoyable and beneficial on both sides of the equation. Both groups had the chance to speak in a foreign tongue with native speakers and improve their language skills. By the time our French friends departed, everyone felt a little bit more connected and realized that their foreign counterparts aren't so different after all.

## The 411 on SLOs

By Mallory Morgan

Remember those stressful tests you failed in September? Those were SLOs - Student Learning Objectives- and you shouldn't worry too much about them because they weren't actually meant to test you! These tests were designed as a new method of teacher evaluation, and the important thing isn't how well you did, but how much you improve when you take that same test at the end of the year.

Under this system, the effectiveness of your teachers will be partially determined by how much better you do the second time around (after actually learning the material) compared to students of the same age and socio-economic background in New York State.

The document *Guidance on the New York District-Wide Growth Goal Setting* (published by the New York State Department of Education) provides the definition of an SLO as, "an academic goal... [that] must be specific and measurable [and ] based on available prior student learning data..." According to the Director of Instruction of Vestal Central Schools Dr. Laura Lamash, the main controversy that has arisen from these tests comes from the phrase "specific and measurable." While she recognizes that tests of any kind are a valuable tool to measure learning, she says that, "much of what makes education meaningful and inspiring is not always "specific" or "measurable." This phrase risks turning education into something so rigid and uniform that it "fails to recognize the complex relationship that makes education meaningful and rich," according to Lamash.

As this change mainly effects your teachers, I

presented some questions to several elementary school educators who will remain anonymous due to the frankness with which they spoke and the delicate nature of their comments. Several teachers frame their concern around student discomfort. They reported that the tests were stressful for

students unaccustomed to formal testing, and some actually broke down into tears out of frustration.

Another concern is that the tests were not individualized and so were not designed with special needs students in mind. Still

others have a problem with the

fact the tests are not representative of current curriculum, requiring many to "teach to the test" because SLOs are usually not written by those who are actually responsible for teaching the material.

Other teachers were a bit more fair with their judgment of the SLOs, saying that like any major change, it comes with both the good and bad. The general feeling is that a new method of evaluation means rethinking and refocusing old processes, which while providing the possibility for great benefit, will remain disruptive and meaningless until SLOs can be refined and made more practical. However, a system so new cannot be condemned for trying to improve the withering state of American education.

Sources

[http://www.nysut.org/files/research\\_studentlearningobjectives\\_03.pdf](http://www.nysut.org/files/research_studentlearningobjectives_03.pdf)

<http://www.chesterufsd.org/district.cfm?subpage=800481>

*... the effectiveness of your teachers will be partially determined by how much better you do the second time around*



# Bear Facts

November 2012



<http://www.270towin.com/>

## *Election Coverage websites*



<http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/>



[http://  
www.barackobama.com](http://www.barackobama.com)

Welcome to the  
Timeline of U.S. Presidential Elections!



[http://www.100bestwebsites.org/alt/  
evmaps/electoral-maps.htm](http://www.100bestwebsites.org/alt/evmaps/electoral-maps.htm)

<https://election.twitter.com/>



The TWITTER  
Political Index

[www.mittromney.com/](http://www.mittromney.com/)



<http://www.c-span.org/Campaign2012/>

# CSPAN





# Bear Facts

November 2012



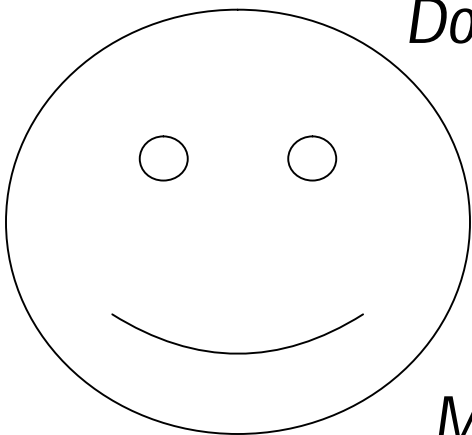
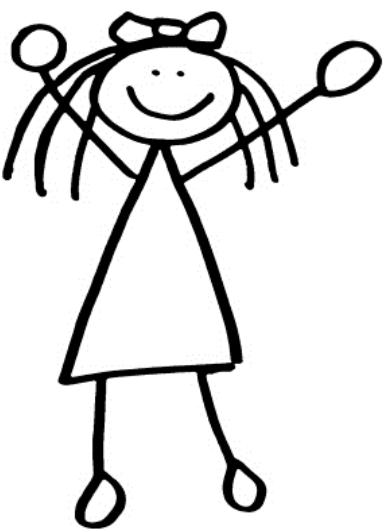
# Yearbook News

Seniors

Seniors

Email your **Summer Memory** pictures, along with the names of those in the picture, to [VHSYearbook@yahoo.com](mailto:VHSYearbook@yahoo.com)

Send in your Little Seniors pictures for the two-page spread. This is not the same as the Parent Ad pictures. These are free!



Don't be a smiley face in the yearbook. Get your senior picture taken NOW. See Ms. Vanderpool or Mr. Weisse in Social Studies for details.

**[VHSYearbook@yahoo.com](mailto:VHSYearbook@yahoo.com)**

Watch the mail! Order forms for the 2013 VHS Yearbook will be mailed home by SmartPay in December. You must order online or by mail with SmartPay. No orders are taken here at school.